CHAPTER 16

STORY BY NOBUAKI KANAZAWA ART BY J-TA YAMADA

KING'S GAME ORIGIN

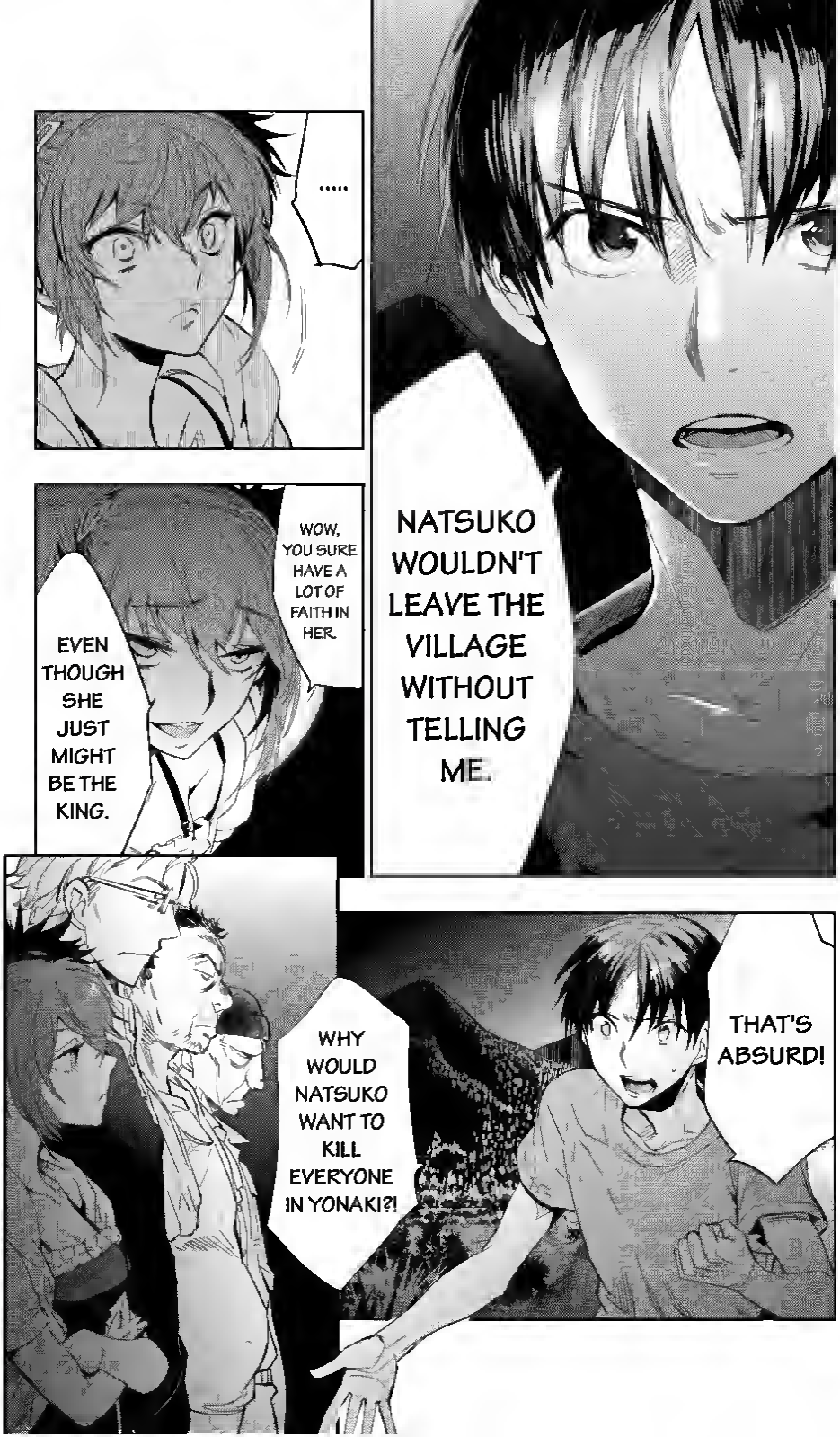
"HH
RUSTLE
HH
HH
RUSTLE
SHUUHEI-SAN?
MICHIKO...?
AND KOUJI-SAN AND ATSUSHI-SAN...

WHAT'RE THEY DOING WAY OUT HERE?
WHO'S THERE?!
SHINE
!?
JOLT
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
RUSTLE

OH.
K-KA-ZUNARI ...?
AH, W-WE'RE..
NOD
WHAT'RE YOU ALL DOING OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS SO LATE?
SHUUHEI-SAN...
...HAVING A DISCUSSION...
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
WE WEREN'T COMFORTABLE TALKING AROUND ALL THE COPS IN THE VILLAGE.
ARE THEY KEEPING IT SECRET?
OUT HERE?

NO... CAN'T SAY I HAVE.
GO TILT
I CAN'T FIND HER ANYWHERE
SHUUHEI-SAN, HAVE YOU SEEN NATSUKO?
OH, YEAH...
SHE'S NOT AT HER HOUSE, EITHER.
NOPE, I ALREADY CHECKED
SHE'S PROBABLY AT THE MEETING HALL, NO?
MICHIKO, YOU ..DIDN'T SEE HER EITHER?

NNNNNNNNOPE.
MAYBE SHE'S SO AFRAID OF THE KING SHE'S HIDING SOMEWHERE?
THE COPS HAVE THE ONLY ROAD OUT OF HERE BLOCKADED.
OR MAYBE SHE JUST MADE A RUN FOR IT?
DON'T BE RIDICU-LOUS!
AND BESIDES...


.....
NATSUKO WOULDN'T LEAVE THE VILLAGE WITHOUT TELLING ME.
WOW, YOU SURE HAVE A LOT OF FAITH IN HER.
EVEN THOUGH SHE JUST MIGHT BE THE KING.
THAT'S ABSURD!
WHY WOULD NATSUKO WANT TO KILL EVERYONE IN YONAKI?!

MOST OF THE ADULTS WERE AGAINST YOUR RELATIONSHIP.
HOW DOES COLD-BLOODED MURDER BENEFIT ME?!
WELL...
WHAT?! THAT MAKES NO SENSE!
FOR YOU?
I DUNNO.. MAYBE..

AND THE WAY SHE'D GLARE ANY TIME I SO MUCH AS SPOKE TO YOU...
...I'D SAY NATSUKO PRETTY MUCH LOATHED THE ENTIRE VILLAGE.
MOM TOO! YOU AND ALL THE OTHER VILLAGERS WHO WON'T ACCEPT US!
I HATE YOU, I HATE YOU!
THAT'S...
AND WHAT ABOUT HER GREAT-GRANDMA?
THE WITCH DOCTOR?
HEH

NOW THAT'S SUSPI-CIOUS
WHO'S MORE LIKELY TO BE BEHIND SUPER-NATURAL MURDERS THAN A WITCH?
OH, SHOVE IT!
MAGIC DOESN'T—
AH.
BY THAT LOGIC...
...YOU'RE JUST AS LIKELY TO BE THE KING, KAZUNARI.
YOU'RE COUSINS, AFTER ALL.
YOU SHARE THE SAME BLOODLINE

I TOLD YOU BEFORE...
SWOOOSH
ARE YOU ACCUSING ME OF DOING ALL THIS?!
SCREW YOU!
SWOOOSH
I DON'T TRUST ANYBODY.
MICHIKO...
SWOOOSH

SLIP
MEH.
I'M...
...NOT INTO...
...WASTING MY ENERGY.
ANYWAY, YOU SHOULD GO BACK TO LOOKING FOR NATSUKO.
SKLIFF
SKLUFF
SKLUFF
SKLUFF
SKLUFF
GUYS...
WHAT IS THIS... DREAD I FEEL?
?

BEFORE THINGS WERE JUST TENSE, BUT NOW...
WHAT HAPPENED?
NA-TSU-KO...
GOTTA FIND NATSUKO...

NATSU-KO..
I COULDN'T FIND HER..
I WENT AND TOLD THE POLICE AND THEY SENT A SEARCH PARTY TO LOOK FOR HER...BUT NO LUCK YET...
THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NO SIGN OF A LETTER ANYWHERE.
I'LL START WITH WHAT WE'VE CON-CLUDED...

SUNDAY
AUGUST 13,
12:24 A.M.

GOOOO
YOU'RE... POSITIVE ABOUT THIS, DOUJIMA-SAN?
FSUUU
THIS TIME AROUND, THERE IS NO KING'S GAME LETTER TO BE FOUND.
WHETHER THE KING'S ON GUARD AGAINST US OR NOT.
...WITHOUT A LETTER, THE GAME CAN'T BEGIN.
SO WE CAN ASSUME THERE IS NO NEW ORDER TODAY.
I SURE HOPE SO.
BECAUSE IF THERE IS AN ORDER, AND WE DON'T KNOW WHAT IT SAYS?
THINGS'RE GONNA GET MESSY.

WE'RE WELL AWARE, AND MY MEN ARE STILL SEARCHING FOR THE LETTER NOW JUST IN CASE—
WAVE
QUESTION
DO YOU THINK THE REASON THERE'S NO LETTER. .
...IS BECAUSE THE "KING'S GAME" IS OVER?
DUN
DUN

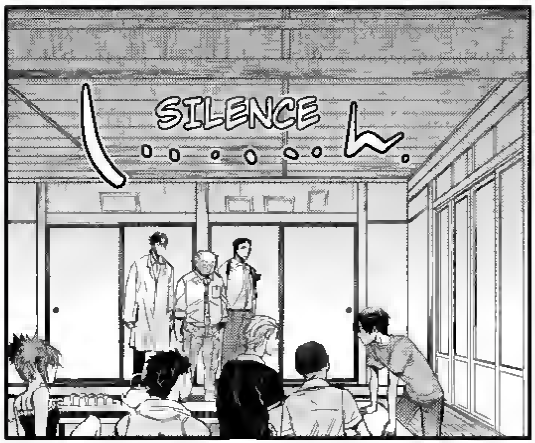
YES.
OVER... YOU SAY?

SO FAR THE LETTERS HAVE COME EVERY DAY...
..PLACED IN VERY CONSPICUOUS PLACES TO ASSURE WE WOULDN'T OVERLOOK THEM.
RATHER THAN THINKING "THERE'S NO LETTER TODAY"...
...SHOULDN'T WE ASSUME "THE KING'S GAME IS FINISHED"?
HRMM...
MURMUR
MURMUR

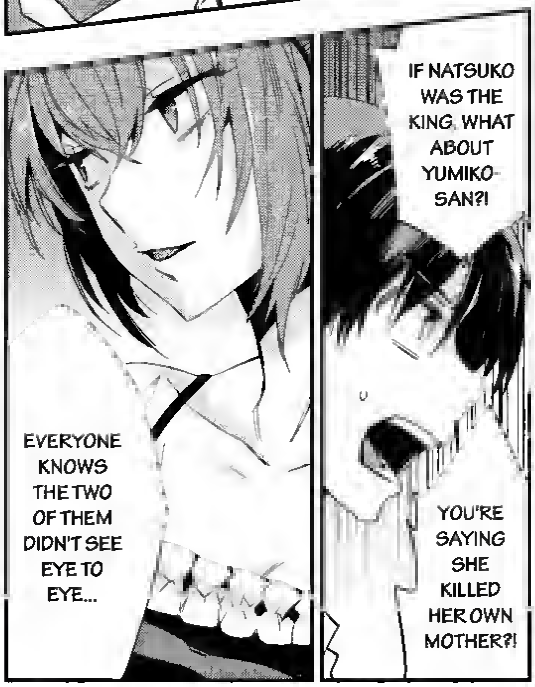
IF THAT'S THE CASE...
...THEN WHY IS IT OVER?
IT'S TOO SUDDEN.
BOB
PERHAPS THE KING FLED THE VILLAGE. .
BECAUSE...
. .THEY'RE ON THE VERGE OF BEING CAUGHT?
GLANCE
SHUUHEI-SAN!
JUST SAY IT!
SLAM!!!
GLARE

BUT SHE IS NOT THE KING! THAT'S IMPOSSI-BLE!
YOU THINK NATSU-KO'S THE CULPRIT!
.....
KAZUNARI...
YOU'RE NOT THINKING STRAIGHT.

FACT IS, NATSUKO VANISHED YESTERDAY...
...AND SHE'S STILL MISSING.
AND AT THE SAME TIME, THE KING'S LETTERS STOP.


SILENCE

IT'S...


EVERYONE KNOWS THE TWO OF THEM DIDN'T SEE EYE TO EYE...
IF NATSUKO WAS THE KING, WHAT ABOUT YUMIKO-SAN?!
YOU'RE SAYING SHE KILLED HER OWN MOTHER?!

WE HAVE TO ASSUME THAT THE TWO ARE RELATED.

...ABOUT YOUR RELA-TIONSHIP.
BUT... BUT...
KILLING HER OWN MOTHER OVER IT...?
SHRRRRRR
WHY NOT?
FROM NATSUKO'S POINT OF VIEW, LIFE WOULD BE FINE IF IT WERE JUST THE TWO OF YOU.
SHUUHEI-SAN!
ANYONE ELSE IS JUST... IN THE WAY.

I'M JUST POINTING OUT THAT HER DISAPPEAR-ANCE COINCIDED WITH THE LETTERS STOPPING.
LOOK, I DON'T SAY THIS OUT OF ANY ANIMOSITY TOWARDS NATSUKO.
IT'S PERFECTLY LOGICAL TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY THAT SHE WAS THE KING THIS WHOLE TIME, NO?
ALSO, I...
I SAW HER.

THE MORNING OF THE DAY TAE-SAN DIED OF A HEART ATTACK...
I SAW NATSUKO OUTSIDE MY HOUSE.
NATSUKO WAS AT YOUR HOUSE?
YES.. AT THE TIME, I THOUGHT NOTHING OF IT.
BUT NOW IT SEEMS SUSPICIOUS.
SHE WAS WALKING LIKE SHE WAS IN A TRANCE ..AND SHE WAS HOLDING A HANDKERCHIEF.
A HANDKERCHIEF ..?

THE LETTER THAT TIME WAS IN MY MAILBOX, REMEMBER?
IT'S POSSIBLE SHE HAD IT WRAPPED IN THE HANDKERCHIEF
THAT WOULD ENSURE SHE DIDN'T LEAVE ANY FINGERPRINTS—
SHUUHEI-SAN!
WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY ANYTHING SOONER?
I'D FORGOTTEN ABOUT IT UNTIL NATSUKO DISAPPEARED.
AND AT THE TIME, I DIDN'T SUSPECT HER AT ALL.

SLAM
HO—
HOLD IT, DOUJIMA-SAN!
GASP
IT CERTAINLY INCREASES THE CHANCE NATSUKO-KUN MIGHT BE OUR "KING"
MMM... IF THAT'S TRUE...
NATSUKO'S BEEN TERRIFIED!
SHE'S BEEN DRIVEN TO TEARS SO MANY TIMES BECAUSE OF HOW WORRIED SHE IS FOR EVERYONE!
HOW CAN YOU SUSPECT HER, OF ALL PEOPLE?!
CALM DOWN, KAZUNARI-KUN!
I JUST SAID IT INCREASED THE CHANCE
...NOT THAT IT DEFINITIVELY PROVES SHE'S THE KING

IS EVERYONE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING THAT NATSUKO DID THIS?!
HONESTLY... I'M CONFUSED...
SCRATCH
I SERIOUSLY DOUBT NATSUKO'S THE KING...
..BUT AT THE SAME TIME, WHY ISN'T SHE HERE?
ERR...
MAYBE..
...THE KING KIDNAPPED HER, OR SOMETHING.
PFF—!
FAHAHAHA!
あはははは!!

THAT'S STUPID!
THE KING'S BEEN OFFING PEOPLE LEFT AND RIGHT.
WHY WOULD HE BOTHER WITH SOMETHING AS COMPLI-CATED AS KIDNAP-PING?
YOU STILL CAN'T RULE IT OUT!
HAHAHA
KAZUNARI...
LOVE IS BLINDING YOU.
LOOK AT EVERYONE'S FACES.

IT'S NORMAL THAT THEY WOULD.
NATSUKO VANISHED INTO THIN AIR AND THEY'RE BEGINNING TO SUSPECT HER
EVERY-ONE ..
SEE?
DAMMIT, MICHIKO—!
GRAB
OH...
I BET EVEN THE PEOPLE WHO AREN'T HERE, LIKE RYUUJI AND FUMIKO-SAN, ARE STARTING TO SUSPECT HER.
DUNNO ABOUT LITTLE KAZUYA, THOUGH

HYPO-THETICAL ARGU-MENTS WON'T GET US ANY-WHERE.
WE'LL CONTINUE SEARCH-ING FOR NATSUKO-KUN ... AND THE TRUTH WILL COME TO LIGHT WHEN WE FIND HER.
THE TRUTH.
DOUJIMA-SAN!
PLEASE, YOU HAVE TO FIND HER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!
WE DON'T KNOW WHAT MIGHT'VE HAPPENED TO HER!
IF WE DON'T GET HER HOME SOON...

I UNDERSTAND... I'VE GOT A HUNDRED MEN COMBING THE MOUNTAINSIDE.
AS LONG AS SHE'S NOT HIDING FROM THEM THEY SHOULD FIND HER TODAY.
OKAY, I'LL HEAD OUT AND LOOK FOR HER TOO!
KAZUNARI-KUN, YOU NEED REST.
YOU WERE UP ALL NIGHT, WEREN'T YOU?
THAT DOESN'T MATTER!
LET ME HELP!
NATSUKO!

FORGET IT! I'M NOT PUTTING ANY VILLAGERS TO WORK IN THE SEARCH PARTY
THIS IS OUR JOB!
FINE.
I DON'T NEED YOUR PERMISSION, I'LL GO ON MY OWN!
KA-ZUNA-RI—
STEP
SHAKE SHAKE
SIS-
JUST HANG TIGHT, NATSUKO!

I SWEAR I'LL FIND YOU!

SUNDAY
AUGUST 14,
10:19 P.M.

DAD...
WHAT SHOULD I DO...?
STUMBLE
WOBBLE
FUMU

ARE THEY STILL LOOKING FOR THE KING'S LETTER?
IF THEY HAVEN'T FOUND IT YET...
...THEN DEPENDING ON THE ORDER...
...I MIGHT DIE TONIGHT.
TICK
TICK
TICK
FORGET THAT..
NATSUKO...

WHERE ARE YOU...?
SLIDE
I'LL TRY THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN TOMORROW.
GRAB
THERE'S A LITTLE CHARCOAL-BURNER'S HUT OUT THERE.
MAYBE SHE'S HIDING INSIDE.
MPH—!
SWAY
POMPF
THEN...
I SHOULD CHECK ALONG THE WATERFALL AND THE RIVER.

AFTER THAT...
07:00
TICK
SLUMP